

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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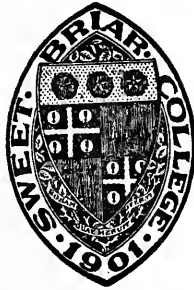
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BULLETIN

# Sweet Briar College

SWEET BRIAR, VIRGINIA



ADDRESS IN MEMORIAM

N. C. MANSON, Jr.

BY

REV. CARL E. GRAMMER, S. T. D.

President of the Board of Directors

FOUNDERS' DAY

October 24th, 1924

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SWEET'S BRYAN COLLEGE

# In Memoriam

N. C. MANSON, JR.

I do not know how I can better fulfill the duty that has been assigned me of telling to the students of Sweet Briar what manner of man N. C. Manson was than by first reading the minute that has just been adopted by the Board of Directors.

## MINUTE

NATHANIEL CLAYTON MANSON, JR.

"It is difficult to express in language that will sound measured and well considered the extent of the indebtedness of Sweet Briar College to N. C. Manson. Elected in July 1903 to fill the first vacancy on the Board, he soon became the chairman of the Executive Committee, and bore stoutheartedly for years the chief burden of the financial troubles and anxieties that marked the first dozen years of the college's existence. Critical decisions of great moment had to be made by him for the Board in emergencies, and to him was constantly left the selection of agents and choice of means in carrying out the policies approved by the Board.

"On the resignation of the presidency of the Board by Bishop Randolph, Mr. Manson was the unanimous preference of the Board for the vacant position. He felt, however, that the chairmanship of the Executive Committee should not be combined with the presidency of the Board, and refused the official leadership that he might retain the more onerous position. No voice had greater weight in our councils and no influence was more potent in binding us together in harmonious coöperation. The conduct of the farm was chiefly in his hands and under agents of his selection.

"Living so near the college and associated with it so closely during its entire existence, visiting it so frequently, he was in a preëminent degree the representative of the Board to the faculty and the students. Happy, indeed, was the Board in being represented by such a man, so wise, considerate and firm, and yet so genial, cheerful and gentle; so responsive to the needs and charms of youth, and yet so versed in the counsels of experience. For years he was a kind of father to the girls. His memory for names and faces was phenomenal, but not more so than the abundance of his kindness and the sweetness of his nature. It was indeed a wonder and admiration to see a lawyer of high standing at the bar, a distinguished citizen and man of large affairs, who bore his honors so lightly and kept his heart so fresh and young. These qualities were so unique and unusual that one almost forgets to mention his liberality to the college at every call for aid, and the generosity with which he devoted to it his time and professional services.

"It is good that one of our buildings shall bear for all time his honored name. Foremost Director, Upright Citizen, Christian Gentleman, his memory will always be fragrant on these hills.

"None knew him but to love him,  
None named him but to praise.'"

Inasmuch as Mr. Manson's ill health prevented the present student body from knowing him as well as its predecessors knew him it is only fitting that I should tell you somewhat more fully than was possible in that official minute of his life and character. I confess that I find it difficult to speak of him without more emotion than is either becoming or agreeable. We were associated in this responsibility over twenty years, and never had an unpleasant incident in our long friendship, which became more and more intimate as the years passed. He was indeed a man who entered into the inner chambers of the hearts of his friends.

His first connection with the Board of Directors came about by our employment of him as our counsel in a suit that arose over the excessive fees charged by the counsel of the executor of the estate. Those lawyers never rendered a single service, for the litigation for which they were retained by the executor was compromised by the trustees, yet their fees aggregated some \$15,000. The eminent lawyers evidently felt that this foundation in Amherst County ought to pay to the profession something like the toll that a benevolent institution in Albemarle County had paid. This immense bill was simply for retaining fees. Under the old judiciary system the College did not have much of a chance in such a contest, and we were only able to reduce the charges sufficiently to pay the cost of the litigation. We felt, however, that we owed it to the public welfare to make the fight, and were so much gratified with the thorough manner in which Mr. Manson handled our case that at the very first vacancy in the Board, the one created by the death of the Rev. Dr. Carson, he was elected a member. By this step the Board gained a competent legal adviser in one of its members, and also, since Mr. Manson was a Presbyterian and the majority of the Board were Episcopalians, proved the sincerity of its purpose to build the College upon a broader basis than any one denomination could afford.

He soon became the Chairman of the Executive Committee, and beyond any other member of the Board gave to the College his time, thought, energy and care. No history of this Institution will be accurate that does not give him a leading place among those who made our founder's generous bequest effective and fruitful.

Would that I could in any way adequately depict him so that

his personality as well as his services might be duly remembered here! A native of Lynchburg, he grew up in that picturesque city of hills, and was educated in its public schools. His college degree was taken at Hampden-Sidney, where he distinguished himself especially by his proficiency in Latin prose composition, that most searching of intellectual disciplines. His professors urged him to apply for one of the fellowships which the Johns Hopkins University, just opening at that time, was offering to the promising students of the land. Walter Hines Page took one of these first fellowships. It was in the classics, and it may have been, and most probably was the very fellowship Mr. Manson was urged to seek. The coincidence is striking, for Mr. Page and Mr. Manson had much in common: they had the same capacity for friendship, the same kindness of heart, the same independence of spirit, the same freshness and originality of flavor. I doubt not but that Mr. Manson would have made much the same kind of statesman as Mr. Page if he had entered upon a political or diplomatic career.

He had, however, chosen the profession of the law, and after several years of teaching, entered the Law School of the University of Virginia. At the next desk to his was a student who afterwards became the President of the United States. It is pleasant to recall that in a class including a man of such preëminent talents as Woodrow Wilson, Mr. Manson, though a member of the Law School only one year, was elected the President of the Class.

He began the practice of law in Lynchburg, and in 1884 at the age of 25 was elected to the Mayoralty, an office that he filled for three successive terms of two years, enforcing the liquor laws of the city with a vigor hitherto unknown.

His qualifications for success as a politician were unique: his recollection of names and faces was truly marvelous, and his address was unusually winning, being a happy combination of cordiality, frankness and self-respect. It was at this stage in his career that I first saw him. He was pointed out to me while he was boarding a train in Alexandria, as a rising politician, whom we might expect to see in the course of time represent Virginia in the United States Senate.

Upon this political career, however, Mr. Manson deliberately

turned his back. He realized that the Law was a jealous mistress, who would bestow the richest rewards only upon those who gave her an undivided allegiance. He also felt that the career of the politician who has not independent resources is beset with temptations and snares. After careful thought he determined to devote himself entirely to the important services that a well-equipped lawyer can render a community. One public office he accepted and retained almost till his death; that was the position of City Attorney of Lynchburg.

He became in due time one of the acknowledged leaders of Lynchburg's able bar, and as guardian and trustee as well as counselor, was widely useful. An elder of the Presbyterian Church, a leader in all good causes, a citizen of irreproachable life and character, he was one of the chief pillars of aspiration and noble endeavor in this part of our land.

When he accepted the chairmanship of the Executive Committee of Sweet Briar, this College became one of the main interests of his life. Its farm was under his peculiar care, and there was not an employee on the place that he did not know by name.

As for the girls of the College, his attitude toward them was paternal. He knew their names and faces, and no flight of years seemed to dim his remembrance. Fortunate indeed was the College in such a Director.

Lord Morley writes of Mr. Gladstone that he lived at a great depth of being: it always seemed to me that Mr. Manson lived with a great unity of being. He was not one of these people who are drawn in different directions, and almost torn apart by opposite tendencies—their inclination turning one way and their business another, their aspirations having one goal, and their lives another, their tastes and their conscience opposing one another. He was so unified within that he seemed to have no temptations. Whatever he went into, whether it was a game of golf, or a legal contest, he went into it wholeheartedly. The inward serenity and unity of his nature showed itself in his frank and cordial greeting; the whole man met you without any reserves. His freedom from backward-looking thoughts and self-consciousness gave a certain naïveté to his social converse.

I never heard him argue a case as a lawyer, but I know exactly

what kind of pleader he was. His reliance could be upon no subtleties or ingenuities of presentation or turns of phrase. By rigorous examination he made himself sure of his facts and he based his contentions on fundamental principles and common sense interpretations of language.

As a Trustee no man could be a better colleague, more willing to consider the views of others, more coöperative, even when the plan finally adopted was not his own. He was a source of harmony, as well as a wise counselor.

I am most anxious that the lineaments of his noble countenance may be preserved to this College. President McVea and I were planning to give him a pleasant surprise next Commencement. Our scheme was to ask everyone connected with the College, either now or in the past, and in whatever capacity, to join together in contributing a sum which would enable us to have his portrait painted in oil—no one to contribute more than a dollar, and the painting to be done by some artist approved by Mrs. Manson. It is, alas, too late to give him this token of our affection and admiration, but I hope that we may yet be able to secure his portrait, painted from photographs, and presented to the college by the donors whom I have indicated. We can at least by this honor show to his wife, who so fully shared and encouraged his interests, how deeply we sympathize in her loss and how highly we revere his memory.

I hope that it will be hung in some prominent position, either in the administration building or in the new library. It will not, however, convey its full message to those who look upon his manly figure and noble, beaming face unless it also reminds them that a life so singularly at unity with itself, so loving, and so pure, attained not that inward harmony or that spirit of service without the assistance of religion. N. C. Manson was a man of faith, and he wrought his faith into the texture of his life by diligent service. His convictions were clear and strong, but singularly without the hardness that encases the views of so many strong men. They were strong to bear fruit, but they were not steel-tipped to wound. With him the great things mattered, and not the little things. He took no interest in denominational rivalries, and although he was conservative in theology, never showed the least sign of alienation from those of

a different theological school. With him religion was supremely a way of life.

No one could have submitted more unrepiningly to the semi-invalidism of the last year or so. No murmur ever fell from his lips. Again and again he would say that he had had a full life and was grateful for all that had been given him. His last days were serene and bright and lovely as a Lapland night. He was kept in perfect peace. His funeral was at once the Church's proud celebration of a victorious life, and the solemn mourning of a bereaved city.

Such, and much more, for my poor words are unable to express either our sense of loss or his charm and merits, was the Director of this College whom we so recently lost, and whom we specially commemorate today.

His proficiency in Latin at college brings to one's mind the tender lines of Horace, that can seldom have been more fittingly applied than to him:

"Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus  
Tam cari capitis."





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